03/16/22 COVID NEWS WATCH

108 Volunteers Will Test New mRNA Vaccines for HIV + More

The Defender's COVID NewsWatch provides a roundup of the latest headlines related to the SARS CoV-2 virus, including its origins and COVID vaccines.

By The Defender Staff

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108 Volunteers Will Test New mRNA Vaccines for HIV

Gizmodo reported:

> The next generation of potential vaccines for HIV is set to be tested in humans. This week, the U.S. National Institutes of Health launched an early clinical trial that will track the safety of three experimental HIV vaccines, all being developed by Moderna and based on its mRNA technology, the same platform used for its FDA-approved COVID-19 vaccine.
>
> mRNA is a vital part of how our cells function. It contains the genetic instructions needed for cells to produce proteins. Normally, this mRNA is carried over from the cell's DNA, but mRNA vaccines deliver their own packet of instructions to cells. In the case of COVID-19, the vaccines tell our cells to produce the spike protein of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, a key part of the virus that allows it to infect cells.
>
> The same principle underlies the three HIV vaccine candidates now being tested by the NIH. They're all designed to have the body's cells produce the spike protein of HIV, though they're encoding slightly different but closely related proteins. Moderna is developing the shots in collaboration with scientists at the Scripps Consortium for HIV/AIDS Vaccine Development at the Scripps Research Institute and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation-funded IAVI Neutralizing Antibody Center at Scripps.

How Omicron Fueled an Unprecedented Wave of Breakthrough Infections in WA

The Seattle Times reported:

> These so-called "breakthrough" infections started popping up throughout the country last summer. As vaccination rates climbed and infections persisted, concern grew. At the time, the Delta variant was overwhelming the region's healthcare systems. Then the highly infectious Omicron variant landed in the state and breakthrough cases nearly doubled.

By the end of January, Washington state had reported 342,195 breakthrough infections. About 75% of those had occurred within the prior two months.

"With 85% of eligible people in [King County] completing their primary vaccination series and with the more infectious Omicron variant, we saw more people getting infected who were vaccinated as well," King County's health officer, Dr. Jeff Duchin, said during a news briefing last week.

Exclusive: Fauci Said Great Barrington Declaration Reminded Him of AIDS Denialism

The Epoch Times reported:

Dr. Anthony Fauci tried linking a strategy to avoid lockdowns to scientists who questioned whether HIV causes AIDS, according to an email obtained by The Epoch Times. Fauci, the longtime director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and his former boss, Dr. Francis Collins, both strongly opposed the strategy, which was outlined in a document called the Great Barrington Declaration on Oct. 4, 2020.

Martin Kulldorff, then of Harvard University; Dr. Jay Bhattacharya of Stanford University; and Sunetra Gupta, a professor at Oxford University signed the declaration, which promoted policies aimed at minimizing death and social harm while acknowledging that COVID-19 poses a much greater threat to older people than younger people.

"The most compassionate approach that balances the risks and benefits of reaching herd immunity, is to allow those who are at minimal risk of death to live their lives normally to build up immunity to the virus through natural infection, while better protecting those who are at highest risk," they wrote.

WHO: New COVID Deaths Fell 17% Last Week, but Cases Rising

Associated Press reported:

The number of new coronavirus deaths reported worldwide fell by 17% in the last week while COVID-19 infections rose, reversing a decline in cases that first began in January, according to the World Health Organization.

The biggest increase in cases were seen in the Western Pacific and Africa, where infections rose by 29% and 12%, respectively. Elsewhere, cases dropped by more than 20% in the Middle East, Southeast Asia and the Americas. In Europe, cases inched up by about 2%.

WHO said those numbers "should be interpreted with caution." It noted that many countries are changing their COVID-19 testing strategies as they exit the acute phase of the pandemic, and are testing far less than previously, meaning that many new cases are going

undetected.

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Should Parents Be Worried About Vaccine Effectiveness for 5- to 11-Year-Olds? An Expert Weighs In

CNN Health reported:

> To many parents' dismay, a new report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that the COVID-19 vaccine is less effective against the Omicron variant for children ages 5 to 11 than for older children and adults. Two doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine reduced the risk of Omicron infection by 31% among children 5 to 11 years old, compared with 59% among those 12 to 15.
>
> Why is this happening? How worried should parents and caregivers be? Do the new data mean they should keep masks on their kids in school and avoid indoor extracurriculars? What are implications for kids with underlying medical conditions? And what's the update for kids under 5?

Feds Say They'll Ration COVID Treatments Amid Funding Standoff

Axios reported:

> Amid a congressional standoff over COVID funding, the federal government will delay buying "hundreds of thousands" of monoclonal antibody treatments and instead cut state allocations of the drug by 30% starting next week to stretch supplies, senior Biden administration officials said Tuesday.
>
> This is the first time administration officials are threatening pain in the form of cutbacks to the states if Congress doesn't approve new COVID spending.
>
> The move is likely to spark criticism from Republicans, who most want these treatments, and have already complained that the administration is holding back some therapies. "Even with these cuts, we anticipate that our supply of monoclonal antibody treatments will run out by late May," a senior administration official said.

Omicron BA.2 Sub-Variant Now Nearly a Quarter of New COVID Cases in U.S., CDC Estimates

CBS News reported:

> The BA.2 sub-lineage of the Omicron variant now makes up nearly a quarter of new COVID-19 infections nationwide, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated Tuesday, up from around 1 in 10 new cases just a week prior.
>
> BA.2's prevalence is the highest in the Northeast, according to the CDC's "Nowcast" estimates published Tuesday. In the region spanning New York and New Jersey, the agency estimates 39.0% of circulating viruses are BA.2. In New England, the prevalence of BA.2 is at 38.6%.
>
> The new estimates come as the sub-lineage has raised concerns abroad, where it has grown to dominate cases reported worldwide — including in countries that are now facing a renewed surge of infections just as they had moved to lift many of their pandemic restrictions.
>
> However, the increase in BA.2's proportion in the U.S. comes as the CDC has continued to track a nationwide slowdown in the pace of new COVID-19 hospitalizations and cases.

Some Hospitals Ask Patients, Visitors to Remove N95s, Citing CDC

Politico reported:

> Patients across the country say they are often told to replace their N95s with surgical masks as they enter hospitals. One woman said she was told her mask could be carrying COVID on its surface. A Chicago facility, Northwestern Medicine, said it asks visitors to replace or cover their masks with a surgical mask provided by the hospital for quality control. And inside many hospitals, doctors and nurses often don surgical masks when treating patients, all in line with CDC recommendations.
>
> The CDC and the White House's COVID response team declined to comment but have argued that even in hospitals, surgical masks provide sufficient protection in many situations. The CDC has stopped short of recommending N95s universally and says the public can also wear cloth masks, which its studies found are the least effective in stopping COVID transmission.

Urgent: 3 Ways to Help Stop Biden's Vaccine Mandates

Global Powers Inch Closer to Agreement to Waive COVID Vaccine Patents

The Guardian reported:

> Global powers have inched closer to an agreement to waive patents for COVID-19 vaccines, a move that would allow for cheaper generic versions to be manufactured and distributed among developing nations faster.
>
> A leaked document, seen by the Guardian, reveals details of a compromise struck between the United States, the European Union, India and South Africa that would end a deadlock over an intellectual property waiver, 18 months after the proposal was first taken to the World Trade Organization.
>
> If passed, the compromised version of the waiver will see only patents for COVID-19 vaccines suspended for either three or five years, and means that treatment and testing formulas will still be subject to intellectual property protections.

Diabetes & COVID: Scientists Explore Potential Connection

Associated Press reported:

> Just six months after a mild case of COVID-19, a Crown Point, Indiana, boy, age 11, was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes. His parents were floored — it didn't run in the family, but autoimmune illness did and doctors said that could be a factor.
>
> It's clear that in those who already have diabetes, COVID-19 can worsen the condition and lead to severe complications. But there are other possible links.
>
> To learn more, scientists in Denmark are enrolling adults recently diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes, including some who had COVID-19. Over time, the researchers will check whether the condition progresses faster in those who had COVID-19, which could help clarify the infection's role, if any, in developing diabetes, said researcher Dr. Morten Bjerregaard-Andersen, a diabetes specialist at the Hospital of South West Jutland.

Europe Begins Reviewing Application for AstraZeneca COVID Drug

Reuters reported:

> Europe's drug regulator said on Tuesday it had begun reviewing AstraZeneca Plc's (AZN.L) application for antibody-based COVID-19 therapy, a key step towards approval of the treatment in the region, but gave no timeline for a conclusion.
>
> AstraZeneca's antibody cocktail, Evusheld, has already been authorized in the United States to prevent COVID-19 infections in individuals with weak immune systems or a history of severe side effects from coronavirus vaccines.

India Rolls out COVID Vaccine Doses for Children Aged 12–14

Reuters reported:

> India on Wednesday started administering doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to young people aged 12 to 14 as public and private schools re-opened.
>
> The government aims to swiftly expand vaccine coverage by also dropping a restriction on booster doses for those older than 60 only if they had a co-morbidity condition.
>
> The children, estimated by the government to number 50 million, will receive the Corbevax vaccine, made by Biological E, a domestic firm that secured emergency approval for its use in children.

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The Defender Staff

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